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# Rites can have personal touch

By Liz Austin

Writing your own wedding ceremony is a way of making a ceremony personalized, unique and meaningful, according to *Write Your Own Wedding* by Mordecai L. Brill, Marlene Halpin and William H. Genne.

This may consist of writing the entire ceremony or making changes within a traditional one. The latter is predominant according to three Lincoln ministers and a Lincoln rabbi.

Actually, there is no way a Jewish couple may write their entire ceremony because "there are certain passages and prayers in a Jewish ceremony that must be included," Rabbi Henry Jay Karp of the B'Nai Jeshrum Temple said.

For example, he said, every Jewish wedding must include the three verses, the seven blessings, the traditional exchange of rings, the priestly benediction and the final blessing of the wedding.

**Creativity allowed**

Creativity in any other part is permitted, Karp said, adding that the Jewish have a long tradition of openness to creativity.

Karp said Jewish couples could draw material for their ceremony from poetry and prose, but he would encourage Jewish sources.

"If it is going to be a Jewish service and if the couple want the service to reflect their relationship and feelings, I will not restrict their sources as long as it complies with Jewish ethics and morals," he said.

Of course, Karp noted, the ceremony would not be allowed to have anything that refers to Jesus Christ as the savior since this belief is rejected by the Jewish.

Practically any music, as long as it isn't from another religion, also would be acceptable, he added.

Rev. James Bauer of the University Lutheran Chapel said that although there are no set rules for a Lutheran wedding ceremony, there are things the church likes to see included.

**Passage included**

For example, he said the church likes to include the passage from the Bible that says wives must obey their husbands and stress that the union is one that God recognizes as life-long.

Selecting the music seems to be the biggest problem when planning a wedding ceremony, he said. The Lutheran church allows only "Christian music" and contemporary music such as "We've Only Just Begun" is forbidden, he explained.

The Episcopal Church is more restrictive, said Brent Bohlke, pastor of St. Marks Episcopal on the Campus. The Episcopal wedding ceremony must follow the form from the church's book of common prayer, and the church discourages any change in this ceremony, he said.

The couple is encouraged to choose spiritual music, but as long as it doesn't contradict the church's beliefs, anything would probably be approved, he said.

**Basic ceremony**

According to Rev. Virgil Ediger of the Indian Hills Community Church, his church also has a basic ceremony for the couple to follow, but the couple can include things meaningful to them.

The vows of the couple must include a personal affirmation in faith and Jesus Christ, Ediger said. Ephesians 5 Verses 21-33 must always be included in the ceremony, he said. This passage emphasizes a wife's obedience and a husband's love of his wife.

Music that contradicts biblical beliefs would be forbidden, Ediger said. For example "Midsummer Night's Dream," which is a traditional recessional song, would be forbidden because it comes from an opera that doesn't fit with the ceremony.

"We feel that the wedding ceremony is really quite simple," he said. "It is a couple saying their vows before God and his witnesses."

The church discourages things that would draw away from this, he said.

**'Unqualified consent'**

Roman Catholic Churches in Lincoln do not allow couples to write any part of the ceremony.

But according to *Write Your Own Wedding* the main element of a Catholic wedding ceremony is an "unqualified consent before two witnesses, given with the idea of permanence." The ceremony must take place before a priest and a mass is encouraged, the authors said.

Bauer said that although he encourages a couple to write their own vows, most couples don't.

If the couple writes their own vows, they will have a better realization of what marriage is about, he said.

Bohlke agreed and said, "When a couple writes their own ceremony they are certainly more involved in thinking about what they are actually doing and getting into."

But, he added that he felt the trend for couples writing their wedding ceremony was fading. He has had "far fewer" requests for it in the last five years.

**Popularity waning**

Karp also said he felt writing your own ceremony was more popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"There are a million ways of saying I love you," Karp said. "but in the end it all comes down to the same thing."

Karp said he does suggest one change to Jewish couples, a change he and his wife incorporated into their ceremony. That is to break the wine glass together rather than have the bridegroom alone break it, he said.

Traditionally a couple would drink wine from a glass and the bridegroom would break it immediately afterwards so no one else could drink from it, he explained. The drinking from the glass symbolized the couple's first shared experience as husband and wife of which no else could share. But the breaking of the glass also could symbolize the wife's loss of virginity to her husband or male dominance, Karp said.

By breaking the glass together it rids the sexist meaning but maintains the symbol of sharing, he said.

Bohlke said one ceremony that stands out in his mind is the marriage of an American bride and a Hungarian groom.

Hungarian prayers, music and wedding customs were incorporated into the Episcopal ceremony to make the wedding more meaningful to both, he said.

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